

RESPONSE FORM PROCESSING SYSTEM

TECHNICAL FIELD OF THE INVENTION

This invention relates in general to the field of data processing systems and, more particularly, to a method and system for processing response forms.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

A common method of receiving feedback from customers of a variety of businesses is through the use of response forms such as comment cards. An owner of a business can use the responses gleaned from his customers to improve services, spot unsatisfactory areas of his products or services or to evaluate marketing techniques and potential. In short, the comments of a customer who has just patronized an establishment are one of the most powerful sources of information to the owner of a business. In the past, the inconvenience to the customer of filling out a response form or using other methods of customer surveys have reduced the effectiveness and accuracy of the comments received. For example, if a response form takes more than just a few seconds for a customer to fill out, chances are that the average customer will not bother to fill out the form unless he is especially dissatisfied with some area of the business. This inconvenience results in inaccurate data compiled from these systems.

Accordingly, a need has arisen for a system for soliciting responses from customers that will encourage the accurate compilation of data from a customer base. A further need has arisen for a system and method of processing the response forms into useful formats such that the data compiled can be used effectively.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

In accordance with the present invention, a response form processing system is provided which substantially eliminates or reduces disadvantages and problems associated with prior art methods and systems of soliciting responses from a customer base. The system of the present invention comprises a group code reader and a response scanner, coupled to a processor system. The system of the present invention is operable to read response forms which comprise both a group code and responses placed on the forms by a customer. The group code comprises information as to a particular group of questions present on a particular response form as well as information as to the client or business associated with the response form.

According to another embodiment of the present invention, a printer may be coupled to the processor to allow for the generation of reports illustrating the compiled and organized data gleaned from a number of response forms. The processor is operable to organize and tabulate the responses read from the response forms according to a variety of parameters, for example, by client, question type or time period for responses.

According to still another embodiment of the present invention, the printer coupled to the processors is operable to print the response forms to include both a group code and appropriate questions and response prompts such that the forms printed are readable by the system of the present invention.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

A more complete understanding of the present invention may be acquired by referring to the detailed de-

scription and claims when considered in connection with the accompanying drawings, wherein:

FIG. 1 is an illustration of an exemplary response form used in the system of the present invention;

FIG. 2 is a diagram illustrating the response form processing system of the present invention;

FIG. 3 is a diagram illustrating the organization of the data base files used in conjunction with the system of the present invention; and

FIG. 4 is an exemplary report produced by the system of the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

A common failing of the response forms used by businesses is that they take too long for a patron to fill out. Because of the long period of time required, most patrons will not even begin to fill out the response form unless they are especially dissatisfied or especially pleased with some aspect of the business, goods or services. Accordingly, the data gleaned from the response forms tends to be polarized towards the especially dissatisfactory remarks or especially satisfactory remarks, but does not achieve accurate accumulation or tabulation of more benign information such as marketing or demographic data. The response form processing system of the present invention solves this problem by dividing a body of questions into small groups of, for example, two or three questions each. In this manner, a patron of an establishment is only asked to answer a very small number of questions and the time required by the patron is reduced dramatically. If the response forms are presented to the patron at an appropriate time and in a convenient manner, the number of responses received can be dramatically increased as compared to prior systems.

For example, when a patron of a hotel is checking out of the establishment, there is a small delay while the bill of the patron is processed. Although there is variance in the length of this delay, the patron is usually made to wait approximately ten to fifteen seconds for his bill to be processed. During this time, the response form may be presented to the patron. In the ten to fifteen second time period, the patron can only answer a small number of questions. However, statistically speaking, if the questions are dispersed throughout the response forms in an appropriate manner, an accurate compilation of data can be achieved. In other words, it is statistically equivalent to ask each of a small number of patrons to answer all of the questions and to ask only a small number of questions to a large number of patrons. However, the division of a body of questions among a plurality of different response forms makes the processing of the data received from the response forms slightly more difficult. These difficulties are solved by the system and method of the present invention.

The response form processing system of the present invention is equally applicable where a response group asked to fill out the response forms constitutes a defined group, for example, in polling a known client base. The convenience of providing only a small number of questions to each client within a set client base, mailing list, group of employees or other defined group will still provide for a more accurate and complete data compilation. The difficulties attendant with the compilation of data using the method of dividing a body of questions into small groups are solved by the system of the pres-